

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
HEARING ON
NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURAL
CENTER AND MUSUEM
OCTOBER 17, 2001

Testimony of Kirk Humphreys, Mayor of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

House Committee on Resources

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My name is Kirk Humphreys and I am the Mayor of Oklahoma City.

The purpose of my testimony today is to express the strong commitment of Oklahoma City to the development and construction of the Native American Cultural Center and Museum which is to be located on the 300-acre site on the North Canadian River near downtown Oklahoma City.

Oklahoma City competed with other jurisdictions within Oklahoma to become the designated site for this new Center. Our proposal included:

- Provision of \$5 million from the City
- Provision of the 300-acre tract of land for the site. This site is located at the intersection of I-35 and I-40, which is considered to be the Crossroads of America. The land abuts the renewed North Canadian River with its three dams and navigable water pools.

Oklahoma City is a uniquely appropriate location for the placement of the Native American Cultural Center and Museum. The City has invested over \$390 million in a Metropolitan Area Program (MAPS) over the

past five years to build three dams on the river, a new baseball stadium, a fully rebuilt concert hall, a one-mile canal through the Bricktown area which is just across the river from the Cultural Center site, a new 18-thousand seat arena, a new library learning center and a full rehabilitation of the Myriad Convention Center. The new Cultural Center & Museum will be integrated into this viable revitalization effort as a jewel centerpiece, a location to enhance our tourism industry and economic development as well as a major forum for all people - Native, non-Native, city, state and national - to celebrate our Native American heritage and learn of the history, diversity and richness of the culture.

The time to tell the story of the tribes and their history in Oklahoma is long overdue. We are at a time and have an honorable opportunity to present this story in a manner of integrity and pride. The Center's education and public programming will be centered on this mission, creating a mechanism by which Native people can tell their story.

Education, public programs and visitor services are key to the long-term success of the Center: active public exploration of, participation in and dialog by and between Native Americans and non-Natives are foundations of the Center's concept. It is through programs that the Center will develop and sustain relationships with visitors, constituents and stakeholders, and create experiences that will attract audiences to Oklahoma and serve worldwide audiences through the Internet and publications. The interpretive content and means of expression in exhibitions or through the programs, activities, landscape and the building interconnect to form the visitor experience. Visitors will learn about the diversity of Native American nations and their stories of adversity, courage and endurance. Educational and public programs targeted to a variety of audiences will enhance this exhibition program. Curriculum-based school programs, teacher resource materials, teacher training programs, school outreach and a co-op and internship program will all serve to strengthen the Native American Cultural Center & Museum as an extremely valuable local, national and state resource that discusses Native American cultures and arts like no other place. An active schedule of programs for youth, children and adults will enrich and deepen the Cultural Center and Museum experience.

Of great importance for the Center and the Native American people who will shape it are the arts and performance programs: studio space for artists to create and teach in, artists-in-residence, and a scholarship program will all make it the venue for an explosion of ideas, colors and creativity that will establish the Center as the epicenter of Oklahoma Indian artist production. Dance and theater are an integral part of this artistic outpouring. The Center will host intertribal powwows and social dances, and feature traditional and contemporary music and theater production.

Oklahoma City is increasingly becoming a major focal point for Oklahoma and Native American cultural expression and cultural education. Oklahoma City is home to the annual Red Earth Festival, which is considered to be one of the top Native American art festivals in the world. It also sponsors a week-long arts festival in the downtown area. In addition, we are constructing a new \$40 million art museum. These ongoing activities and promotion of the arts and culture will serve to complement the existence and operation of the Cultural Center.

It is fitting that this project be developed now as a partnership between the City, state and federal government, and our tribes. Oklahoma is home to the largest number of tribal governments of any other state by far. We are home to 39 tribes today, most of whom were moved to Oklahoma by the federal government before statehood. At the State Centennial Celebration in 2007, the opening of the Museum and Cultural Center will send a clear message of Oklahoma's celebration of its Native American culture and will provide a true opportunity for the citizens of our state, country and the world to better understand and

appreciate this valuable heritage. I urge the passage of HR 2742 as soon as possible so that we can move the bill to the Senate.

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